

Postcolonialism and Museum Knowledge: Revisiting the Museums of the Pacific¹

ROY MACLEOD²

ABSTRACT: Museums are the medium of our age. As such, the museum world cannot be isolated from political realities. On the contrary, far from their idealized image as institutional constants, innocently engaged in the “collection, conservation, classification, and display of objects,” most important museums—whether of art, history, anthropology, or natural history—are in a state of change, in management, in motivation, and in their capacities to attract visitors, engage attention, and mediate between what objects “say” and what visitors expect to hear. What is evident in Europe and North America is equally apparent in Australasia and the Pacific—with certain important differences. Today, Pacific museums are exploring a rich mix of postcolonial alternatives. Amongst many institutions seeking to speak to indigenous peoples and to hear their voices, they are focusing attention upon the rituals of cultural affirmation and the local character of knowledge production, as distinct from its global reception and legitimization. As such, they offer the historian of science an object lesson in the entangled relationship between Western and indigenous modes of thought. This paper outlines some of the characteristics and ambivalences currently accompanying the passage from colonial to postcolonial ways of thinking in the museum world of the Pacific.

OUR AGE IS THE age of museums. If we are what we collect, it is in our museums that we see ourselves. There we also see ways in which we—as individuals, as cultures, as scholars—choose to represent ourselves, our objects, and those of others. Our objects speak, not with their own voice, but with the voices of those for whom we are privileged to speak. In the West, museums—whether of art, of science, of natural history, or of technology—are products of a history that predates the Renaissance and finds its purpose and fulfillment in the moral, progressive, and rationalist ethos of the Enlightenment. Systematic

observation, reason, and controlled imagination are the texts; progress and evolution are the messages; and museums are the medium.

Today, in both the Atlantic world and in the Pacific, this portrait of the museum world is entangled in a number of postmodern, postcolonial dilemmas. As Roger Silverstone has put it, curators and scholars are obliged to recognize that the museum “is no longer, if ever it was, innocently engaged in the processes of the collection, conservation, classification and display of objects. On the contrary, it is one among many institutions in our society ‘no longer certain of its role, no longer secure in its identity,’ and no longer isolated from political and economic pressures. It is also not immune to the everyday rejections of deference, the indifference to authority, and to the renegotiations of meanings and symbols that are typical of our time” (Silverstone 1992:34). In museums, acts of creativity and innovation, traditional practices and ways of knowing appear as interwoven narratives, inviting us to read

¹ This paper forms part of a larger project on the role of museums in representing the science and culture of the Pacific island peoples since European contact and during colonial rule. As such it pursues themes advanced at the conference on the Science of Pacific Island Peoples, held at Suva in 1992, the proceedings of which were published by the University of the South Pacific Press in 1994. Manuscript accepted 15 January 1998.

² Department of History, University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW, Australia 2006.

between the lines of labels and catalogs. In so doing, we often learn as much about a society and its institutions as we do about objects on display.

These reflections provoke a closer look at what Kenneth Hudson in 1987 identified as “museums of influence”—institutions that served as models to instruct and inform other institutions and, by implication, ourselves. Hudson listed 37 such museums, six of which were in the United States. Several ethnographical museums, natural history museums, and museums for the history of science were among them. But a special Dantean circle was reserved for former imperial museums, including the Museum of Mankind in London, the Übersee museum in Bremen, and the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam. For Hudson, such imperial museums were at best “anaemic.” Perhaps because of—or in spite of—a similar tradition, there was no “museum of influence” in the former colonial world; nor, for that matter, in Australasia or the tropical Pacific.

If we assume that Hudson’s assessment was accurate a decade ago, its basis has to be revised in the postmodern and postcolonial world of today. On the one hand, there is no doubt that in the last 10 years, new cosmopolitan styles of museum development have increasingly crisscrossed the globe, from the Metropolitan in New York to La Villette and the Museum d’Histoire Naturelle in Paris, stylizing new forms of spectacle and display. Thanks to the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and the internet, news of recent developments has become equally accessible to scholars whether in India or Indianapolis. On the other hand, the increasingly speedy diffusion of metropolitan, internationalist influences—modernist versions of classical forms—is being increasingly contested by local interests, challenging visitors to accord a new primacy to local experience, testimony, and rituals. Although this is most evident in museums devoted to history and the decorative arts, it is no less apparent in many museums of natural history and the sciences of man. Museums are increasingly recognized as spaces inherently influenced by system, gender, and point of view; whose

earlier arrangements have reflected dominant views of art and nature, whose precedence was established by convention and canon. Museums are heterotopias, to borrow Foucault’s phrase—combinations of different places as if they were one (Foucault 1986)—and in the representation of ethnic identities, nationalities, and views of nature, they are undergoing enormous change.

What is true in Europe and North America is equally true in Australasia and the Pacific—with certain important differences. Western museums of art, of natural objects and man-made artifacts, have histories dating from antiquity. Their origins, both architectural and conceptual, are classical, ecclesiastical, and plenipotentiary. In the countries of the Pacific south of the equator, in areas historically of anglophone and francophone influence, museums began similarly, with a few exceptions, as derivative institutions—colonial establishments, serving either the interests of the colonizing power (as in the case of France) or the civic ambitions of settler colonists (as in Australia and New Zealand). Today, however, Pacific museums are exploring a rich mix of postcolonial alternatives. Within the last two decades, new institutions have been created, and older institutions recast, in an exciting if fragile attempt to restate the varieties of history and natural knowledge, and to articulate forms of expression held significant not by the metropolis, but by the periphery. These new practices, once begun in a spirit of colonial self-determination, have latterly become associated with the politics of cultural affirmation and identified with the celebration of indigenous peoples. In some ways, their popular function is being challenged by the success of “cultural centers,” which cultivate an interest in the indigenous present with an eye to the tourist trade. But the framework within which the new conversation takes place stands to contribute a new dimension to museum discourse internationally. As with museums speaking to the native peoples of North America and South Africa, Pacific museums are writing a new chapter in history and the history of science as mutual forms of cultural representation (Kaplan 1994). That

history focuses intently upon the local character of knowledge, as distinct from its global reception; and as such, offers the historian of science an object lesson in the entangled relationship between Western and indigenous modes of thought.

This point can easily be generalized. At a time in scholarship when the history of art and of science are converging enterprises, the museum is becoming their meeting place; as historians of science become historians of "cultures" and listen to new voices—particularly of those whom we now call First Peoples, from Scotland to Tonga, we can explore, as Sandra Pannell has put it, how museums can become collecting sites for indigenous peoples, rather than merely sites of indigenous collections (Pannell 1994:18–39). Historians of science who in the 1970s modeled their understanding of Western science on concepts of laboratory life, in a clinical view of the production of knowledge, can in the 1990s usefully revisit the museum complex and its cultural production of knowledge—and in the process, discover how important museums are as sites of cultural and social negotiation, and as cognitive spaces whose use can challenge received geometries. The relationship between metropolis and periphery becomes one of reciprocal, rather than linear, influence; in thinking globally, we come to have greater respect for those who act locally. The museum world is becoming central to the representation of our ethnicities, nationalities, and multiple identities.

In one sense, constituting the postcolonial museum as a "research site" is not new, as it underlies much of what is conventional in the history of anthropology, technology, the natural history sciences, and the "exhibitionary complexes" from which Western industrial and art museums took their cue (Bennett 1995). Museums inevitably share many of the contradictions that confront contemporary institutions negotiating in the commodity markets of material culture. But their future has an added importance when they become places of encounter between the Casaubons and custodians of inventory knowledge, and the interpreters of cultural change (Jones 1992). If museums are classically part of the

"transnational order of cultural forms"—Baudrillard (1975) called them "mirrors of production"—it is reasonable for historians of science to find in them spaces for the arbitrage and valuation of ideas about the *use* of objects, much as were, a century ago, the meeting rooms of the Linnaean Society and the Society of Antiquaries of London given to their *explication*.

Just as the new observances being required by the secular "cathedrals of science" in the Western tradition warrant closer study, so do those that once followed the progress of empire—imbricated in what the Cambridge History Tripos once called the "expansion of Europe"—to the nineteenth-century colonies in subtropical and tropical Africa, the subcontinent of India, Australasia, and the Orient. When we consider these places as including much of the developing world, questions concerning the translation of the "museum idea" become insistent. Tensions implicit in the metropolis are explicit at the periphery and speak directly to cultural diversity.

In Australasia and the islands of Oceania, such questions hold particular moment. Beginning—in the words of Makamina Makagiansar, formerly assistant director of UNESCO—as "innovative transplants from the elitist cultural milieu of nineteenth century Europe" (Eoe 1990:29), museums are transiting from colonial to local styles in architecture and function (Mead 1983:98–99), while seeking the interests of indigenous peoples in speaking for themselves. Even though the imperial and colonial spectacle in Australasia and the Pacific was less dramatic than elsewhere (smaller colonial armies were deployed in fewer colonial wars), nevertheless, it is in this region, on the threshold of the "Pacific Century," that we find some of the most interesting re-readings of the "museum as text."

COLONIAL MUSEUMS IN A POSTCOLONIAL SOCIETY

From Magellan and the voyages of discovery, Europeans minutely described and depicted the Pacific islands and their inhabi-

tants, languages, and customs. The European vision of the Pacific, collected and conveyed to Europe, reflected a mixture of perceptions, rather than a unified ideology. The exoticism of the natural—often represented in the body, especially the partly unclothed, brown female body, but also the male in warlike pose—became conversational icons of European fantasy, transported from Oceanic fact to Western fable. Representing indigenous peoples as both hostile and welcoming, exotic and savage lent an emphasis to the primitive, the barbaric, and the heathen that accorded well with both pre-Darwinian natural history and Victorian evolutionary theory (MacLeod and Rehbock 1994). From the late nineteenth century, French, German, Dutch, American, and British anthropologists and ethnologists rationalized the study of cultures and their material objects, and made the Pacific safe for Science. Travelers and traders added their notes, producing classifications that were at first more fluid—what Nicholas Thomas called “disputed meanings” (Thomas 1993: 46)—then more fixed. Binaries and oppositions were crafted and imposed, and the middle ground of mutual interchange gradually disappeared. Their legacy remains, in the phrase of James Clifford, a predicament of our time (Clifford 1988).

That predicament was first confronted not in the Pacific, but in Europe, where artifacts of discovery from new worlds became the property of the metropolis and subsumed in the great comparative collections of London, Paris, Amsterdam, and Berlin. From the islands and deserts claimed by France, objects were pirated to Paris—including objects of anthropological interest, rated by science as primitive, that today are being controversially renegotiated as art. In the colonial Pacific, as in Africa and India, the British preferred to use the “museum idea” as a fulcrum of the colonial presence, endowing public/private “cathedrals” (or, given the prevailing Methodist influence in the South Pacific, chapels) of science, analogous to (even looking like) artifactual arsenals, where objects (as in Port Moresby) were retained and preserved as reminders of rituals that preceded the white presence. Within the settler colonies, the “museum idea” voiced

the essence of civic enthusiasm and colonial nationalism. The first museum in the anglophone Pacific was the Australian Museum, founded in Sydney in 1827, with tentative beginnings followed more substantially by the Museum of Victoria in 1854 (Pescott 1954, Anderson and Reeves 1994). Elsewhere, the idea spread—Honolulu’s Bishop Museum in 1889, the Fiji Museum in 1904, the Dominion Museum in Wellington in 1907, and the Museum of Papua at Port Moresby in 1913. All were impressive “establishment” buildings, architectural extensions of the European classical tradition, sometimes located significantly close (as in Suva and Sydney) to law courts, jails, and official buildings and not far from garrison churches.

These colonial museums formed a deliberate part of the Westernizing project—not identical to the civilizing mission, but sharing much of its agenda. Collecting and display were based on the principle that the “world is ours,” and the natural world belonged to science. Pacific museums were intended to inform and reassure Europeans; using the objective tools of science, “putting the natives in their place,” so emphasizing the immutable separateness between Western and native modes of thought (Thomas 1994).

Undoubtedly, as Miriam Kahn has argued, such cultural distinctions served to legitimize racial exploitation; but they were also far-reaching. In asserting the “sanctity” of certain ritual objects, so followed the “morality” of their preservation—ideas that only later, and in a postcolonial framework, could be made to work for local, rather than international, interests (Kahn 1995). For the colonizer, the colonial museum was a metonym of empire (see Coombes 1994). Its function was to demonstrate how colonial governments had secured the care and control of the colonial world—whether preserving specimens for the study of tropical diseases or celebrating imperial sovereignty over the production of natural products. The establishment during Queen Victoria’s jubilee of the Imperial Institute next to the Museum of Natural History in South Kensington was both symbol and manifestation of this imperial vision.

To preserve “memorials of the past”

against what seemed their inevitable disappearance was a principal reason why the Bishop Museum was founded in Honolulu in 1889, while Hawai'i was still an independent kingdom—replacing an earlier attempt at a Hawaiian National Museum between 1875 and 1891 (Rose 1990). Artifacts were often collected by expeditions and given to museums, a process that ignored the relationship between white and native peoples and the objects they handled. Colonial governments thus created museums as archives, codifying a degree of referred sovereignty. For their part, colonial museum staff, rarely professional curators, were more interested in retaining than in interpreting the objects in their possession. When Westerners tried to explicate indigenous artifacts, without the aid of context, they had first to invent the culture into which they could fit. If the original environment of an object was not known to a curator, the culture that produced it could be reduced to an artifact—in itself, an artifact of colonialism (Rodman 1993).

Because museums routinely decontextualize objects, by removing them from everyday life—and so change their interpretative spaces—they can leave gaps in the pathways of production. The neglect of local meanings could be compounded by what were taken as the imperatives of scientific method (Munjeri 1991:449). Gregory Bateson recalled (1940) that in fieldwork, he was “not interested in achieving literary or artistic representation of the ‘feel’ of the culture; I was interested in a scientific examination of it” (Bateson 1972: 81–82). More widely, as is now known, the practices of anthropology did not so much preserve cultures as transform them (Kreps 1994). Insofar as Western science failed to recognize the animistic qualities of inanimate objects, the intimate relationship between spirit and history, it could not recognize that a Maori house, in which artifacts might be kept, was not merely a representation of ancestors, but was the ancestor itself (Hakiwai 1990). Nor could Western science, resting confident in the subject/object distinction, easily understand that a ritual in which a given object (say, a New Ireland, or a Torres Strait islander mask) is used is more signifi-

cant to its possessor than the object itself. What counts is the process by which the object is made, used, and then discarded or destroyed—each, a functional part of the ritual. From this, uncomprehending collectors could benefit, cataloging a discarded or traded object, in the misapprehension that it had no significance whatever to the peoples who produced it (Kaeppeler 1994).

Some island colonial museums—like their urban counterparts, the international exhibitions—managed to exoticize and assimilate at the same time (Karp 1991:377), representing, as in Port Vila, New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), a vision of civilization in which cultural ownership rested in material possession by the colonial power. These served both a *practical* function—as repositories of local, traditional artifacts, “old things,” assembled in one place, and in a semblance of classificatory frames, for administrative convenience; and a *moral* function—what Amartya Sen has called “freeze-frame theorising.” Meanwhile, metropolitan museums reserved for themselves the *Überblick*—the responsibility for depicting the world as it is and theories of its causation, “in terms of age-old constants [by which some] nations succeed and others fail” (Sen 1996:20). The first emphasis in any European museum display on the “primitive”—the first display in any sequence—told a moral tale, from which a wise Providence led humanity toward the dawn of progress.

The colonial museum had thus an important part to play in the transaction of ideas, not least in the (typically, one-way) exchange of artifacts with the metropolis. Progress, evolution, and racial hierarchy appeared to follow easily from the museum idea. That idea was typically forced upon objects, some of which were, as in the traditional Maori house in the National Museum of New Zealand, literally encased and symbolically overwhelmed by the surrounding European architecture. Until quite recently, modern attempts to display the Pacific continued to stress categories, cultural and regional, over modes of thought; and rarely surmounted the limitations of linear Western buildings. To many observers, those straight lines within

which cultures were compressed seemed to have a moral force of their own.

If anything can be said in its defense, it is perhaps that the function of the museum as a morality play, and its exhibitions as uplifting lessons, was consistent with the messages given out by other European institutions. As Foucault has reminded us, from the eighteenth century, museums became embodiments of possession and power, part of whose business was setting boundaries—architectural and conceptual—imposing hierarchies and structuring meanings. In the natural history sciences, including the human sciences, they wrested control of the natural from unruly Nature. In the colonial museum (of which, in different ways, the Australian Museum in Sydney and the Fiji Museum in Suva were good examples), exhibitions of indigenous artifacts emphasized differences between Europeans and local peoples—the first, by exoticizing, or inverting the familiar, taking, for example, well-known phrases (of plants, animals, and natural phenomena) to show how “primitive” their descriptions were; the second, by showing how certain objects, such as war clubs, once served similar functions in Western culture, and in present use implied a link with the earlier stages through which Western man had evolved.

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

When we turn to the Pacific today, what do we see? New imperatives, perhaps with dispersed politics, but with enough potential tensions to rival the culture wars of North America. Today, there are approximately 48 museums in the Pacific islands south of the equator—including 15 national museums—ranging from established institutions in Papua New Guinea with 45 staff and 60,000 objects, to a rented room in Truk, in the Federated States of Micronesia. This does not count the 500-plus museums in Australia and New Zealand, nor the American institutions in Hawai‘i, Guam, and American Samoa.

Apart from the established museums, which retain a problematic postcolonial image, are some 32 cultural centers, which share

in the collection and documentation of artifacts, ranging from the one-room Hunaki Cultural Centre in Niue, established in 1989, to the Bewali Visitor Center and the Waradjan Aboriginal Cultural Center in the Kakadu in Australia’s Northern Territory. In many places, including Australia, cultural centers increasingly are seen as more relevant to the interests of indigenous peoples, because they are not only more inclusive in their coverage and representation of ritual and tradition (Kaepler 1994:42), but are often run by (and for the commercial advantage of) the indigenous peoples themselves. The result is to challenge the role of the museum in postcolonial society—to encourage responsiveness to local interests, while not sacrificing the interests of international scholarship or global tourism.

Possibly the better-known colonial museums outside Australasia are in Micronesia, Niue, Palau, Vanuatu, and in the Solomons. The New Caledonia Museum, first established in 1905, improved its facilities during the Melanesian cultural revival of the 1970s and today occupies a prominent place in Noumea. Elsewhere, new developments are under way in many places, including Fiji, the Solomons, Vanuatu, the Cook Islands, Niue, Belau, Yap, Truk, Kosrae, Ponape, and New Caledonia. Each is looking to alternatives; some seek to use local buildings rather than international architectures, so distancing themselves from Western models and expectations. What role the museum idea will eventually play in the redefinition of cultural identities among Melanesians, Micronesians, and Polynesians is by no means clear. Some island museums are caught up in economies driven by overseas capital, burdened by disease, poverty, illiteracy, and malnutrition, where it is a major challenge to convey histories of cultural achievement (Hudson 1991:464).

Inevitably, questions arise as to the management of indigenous exhibitions within museum structures in which indigenous peoples may be employed, but which are not, self-evidently, part of their culture. Most major museums in Australia have appointed Aboriginal curators; but Aborigines have

made little use of museums. Deep ironies persist in the continued representation of black men's knowledge on white men's walls; and alternative ways of representing Aboriginal knowledge that are acceptable to the Aboriginal peoples must be high on the agenda of Reconciliation. However, because much traditional knowledge, including knowledge of natural phenomena, is regarded as inherently secret to its possessors, few museums have found ways of presenting alternative systems both accurately and acceptably. Above all, there is an abiding fear that the more that indigenous peoples share with established institutions of society, including museums, the more will be taken out of their own control.

These issues are not easily resolved. It is to New Zealand, and to the hugely expensive new National Museum in Wellington, that many look for leadership. For over a decade, in keeping with New Zealand's commitment to biculturalism, Maoris have been routinely consulted in exhibitions showing elements of Maori heritage. Yet, questions remain of power and control. No *pakeha* New Zealand museum scholar who witnessed the disastrous experience of the 1984 "Te Maori" exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, in which the exhibition catalog was dismissed by leading Maoris as an invasion and misrepresentation of geneology and history, could do other than tread cautiously in this field (Kaeppeler 1994:28). Nonetheless, plans to redo the interior of the neoclassical building in Wellington around exhibitions that focus upon Maori history and beliefs, and the equally celebrated plans for a new museum in Auckland, give impetus to the view that bicultural dialogue is both possible and achievable (see Hakiwai 1990).

If it is difficult to forecast the outcome of this postcolonial activity, it is easier to define the challenges that many museums face. Where there are fears that a culture is diminished as its objects are taken away, so there is an urgent interest in preserving the objects and languages of that culture. There is, for example, a new museum in Honiara, on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands, set up by the government to preserve local artifacts

against "loss" (Cole 1994). The Solomon Islands museum has become a repository of local competences, enhancing a sense of belonging and pride among the people of the Islands. In the Cook Islands, a very small museum (only two rooms) has developed a similar formula, to cultivate local talents and skills, including weaving, cooking, and many aspects of traditional women's work, that are in danger of disappearing (Joseph 1980; P. E. Richmond-Rex, Government of Niue, Huanaki Cultural Center, Niue, Cook Islands, personal communication, 26 July 1994). In Western Samoa, "living in a museum" is the key concept, where the "pride" of local craft tradition enters the mission statement of this small but hardy attempt to rise above the tourist dollar (Meleisea 1981). In Papeete, there is a promising Musée de Tahiti et des Iles, with a compelling exhibition of Polynesian navigation, cultural transfer, and exchange (Eoe and Swadling 1991).

In Papua New Guinea, the colonial museum, sited significantly next to the National Parliament, was used for over 60 years to store "miscellaneous" objects found on trips up-country by administrators and visitors. Ultimately, it became a place not only to hold objects, but also to protect them from export as souvenirs. Today, the museum has become a register of national sites, with instructions to preserve and promote all aspects of Papua New Guinean culture—a huge task, given the vast number of language groups in the island. Again, however, it recognizes local pride, together with a commemoration of ethnic diversities.

The acceptance of diversity is by no means universal, for reasons that can lie outside a museum's control. The Fiji Museum, a European building set in a beautiful garden next to the former colonial buildings of Suva, represents perhaps one of the more difficult challenges (Brennan 1990). Under its current director, Kate Hindle, the museum has been transformed from a repository of war clubs and canoes into a lively encounter with Fijian life, past and present. A new architecture—linking European design with local conditions—replaces colonial conventionalism with a vision that brings the natural habitat indoors.

Unfortunately, important silences accompany the museum's account of the large Indian minority that has shared the Fijian islands for over a century (Hunt 1978).

THE FUTURE

"If the victims of progress and empire were weak, they were seldom passive" (Clifford 1988:16). With the end of colonialism, the rise of new nationalisms, the official recognition of and respect for ethnic diversities, and increased local pride in local art, traditions, and knowledge production, the "culture" of museums has had to change. Ironically, it has been the culture of the colonial, not that of the indigenous people, that was destined to pass away (Thomas 1993). Today, the museum movement in the Pacific faces many challenges and opportunities, some of which are common to postcolonial museums everywhere and some that are specific to the region.

First, museums have an important role to play in assisting indigenous peoples to recognize that they *have* a history and not necessarily one of unalloyed subjection (Kohlstedt 1995). To fulfil this role, they must devise ways of opening windows on the past, before they can open doors to the future. Until the 1950s, indigenous peoples were not included in museum statistics in most parts of southern Africa, and in some countries were actively discouraged from visiting museums (Munjeri 1991:446). Even now, in New Caledonia, there are difficulties in attracting Kanak visitors—who say they feel they are entering a cemetery where devils live (Kasatheroui 1989). Only in the last few years have increasing numbers of Melanesian islanders in Papua New Guinea been persuaded to visit museums as part of *their* community life. At this basic level, the museum's task is immense.

Second, museums can make a contribution to linking the history of Western contact in the Pacific with the history of Western expansion in general. Although that expansion may have been guided by master narratives of capitalism, industrialization, and political

and maritime strategy—arbitrary if not willful endorsements of colonial expansion—it was eternally complicated by what Nicholas Thomas called "entanglements"—the everyday activities of missionaries, settlers, educators, traders, and indigenous peoples (Thomas 1991). Museums enjoy a competitive advantage in having a comparative perspective from which to view such entanglements, along with the relationships between non-Western peoples. In the Pacific, as elsewhere, such relations were never static or linear.

Third, looking back, we see that those colonial institutions that lost most were those that learned nothing of the peoples whose lives they governed—a tactless, not to say strategic, mistake. However, part of the history of colonialism has a happy ending. The logic of colonization that privileged Europeans also conserved elements of local knowledge and so preserved cultural facts that indigenous peoples now employ (Thomas 1989). In the museum of the future, appropriation and affirmation may go hand in hand (Thomas 1995). For the present, the language of reaffirmation implies the act of reappropriation, including the repatriation of cultural artifacts. The process of repatriation reflects a fact of modernism, of which postmodernism has again reminded us, that museums have been politicized spaces. This has always had implications for the way in which "museum knowledge" is generated, attributed, and displayed. In the Pacific, this political reality has several dimensions (Bolton 1984, 1993). A politicized perspective can assist the breakup of oppositions, as the museum becomes a space for Reconciliation: where relationships based on artifact, environment, natural knowledge, and human enterprise are represented not in tropes of similarity and difference, but in terms of mutual interdependence; not in a strategy of assimilation, but in the practices of harmonization.

Museums—unlike cultural centers, which offer many possibilities we should be poorer without—have a liminal quality, occupying a space between worlds. In a sense, they present an ideal space for negotiation between competing identities and views of nature. In the Pacific islands, and in the national mu-

seums of Australia and New Zealand, there is room for the language of ethnomimesis, favoring the local and the particular, the values of diversity, as well as those of what appears to be an imposed universal culture (Cantwell 1995). To insist upon the systematic presence of local voices—"cultural performances" (Terrell 1991)—will celebrate rather than separate cultures. In this process, the methods of modern science can help to restore, rather than remove, objects and artifacts in relation to their local context (Hudson 1991:462). Treating objects in the context of their local importance restores sovereignty to their owners. Thus are ancient binaries negotiated away.

As we contemplate the museum's regional future, we reflect upon its Western past. The museum of Europe had its origins in the experience of *wonder*—the essence of poetic appeal—conceived by Aristotle as the highest pleasure; by the Platonists as the essential element in art; by Dürer and the Renaissance as the celebration of creative genius. Its boundaries were set by a governing aesthetic, the masterpiece, the acquisition and possession of which, in a princely wonder-cabinet, held a world in microcosm and expressed symbolic mastery of the world. In the Pacific, the post-colonial museum inclines a different narrative, one celebrating *resonance*, in which the observer is "pulled away from the celebration of isolated objects and toward a series of implied, only half-visible relationships and questions their circumstances of production and meaning" (Greenblatt 1991:51). Different ways of seeing, a traditional openness to Nature, and the imparting of natural knowledge within an overall ethical system—such "lessons" drawn from traditional cultures have an importance of equal value for Western society (Te Papa Tongarewa 1995). If incorporated in Western museums, they can expose, and perhaps dismantle, the more invidious distinctions left by the colonial past.

From South Africa to Samoa, and throughout the Pacific, within the museum community a new postcolonial picture is emerging, which the historian of science and culture cannot afford to ignore. It is unlikely

that there will ever be a smooth integration of indigenous history with the main themes of European expansion. What we can look forward to is a greater participation of local interests in the framing of museum agendas. Driving this is the huge potential of museums as "catalysts of development" (Eoe 1990)—rising in public esteem as they contribute to the economy. Tourists do not travel to Australia or New Zealand, let alone tropical islands, for the sake of seeing museums; but once arrived, visitors will see what they are shown, and, increasingly, what they will see are sophisticated "banks" of cultural materials, which can be lent or "borrowed," and artifacts valued less as curiosities and more as telling statements of national life. It is not perhaps a road many wish to travel, but it is the road that lies ahead.

The historian finds the museum "no longer certain of its role, no longer secure in its identity, no longer isolated from political and economic pressures or from the explosion of images and meanings which are, arguably, transforming our relationships in contemporary society to time, space and reality" (Silverstone 1992). As Nicholas Thomas once reminded ICOM, the aspirations of museums tend to be more ambitious than their accomplishments. No one would deny the many tensions in the museum movement in North America, Europe, or the Pacific. Yet, an exciting future beckons for the museum community. No longer the dusty cloisters detested by Proust or the iconic cathedrals immortalized by Umberto Eco, today's museums are spaces of negotiation and debate, of changing meanings and representations (Kros 1993). In the Pacific, the island museums as well as the major museums of Australia and New Zealand are struggling with ambivalences that have survived their past (Wendt 1980). In many places, the museum idea remains an "introduced concept." But as the notion of "model" museum-making gives way to "postcolonial" dialogue, the Pacific opens as a great potential space for experiment and learning. Is it too much to suggest that where the Pacific may lead, the Atlantic may one day follow?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Earlier versions of this paper benefitted from comments received at the workshop on "Western Science in the Pacific" at the Third Joint Meeting of the British, American, and Canadian History of Science Societies, held at the University of Edinburgh, in July 1996; and from the symposium on "Museums, Western Science, and Indigenous Traditions," held during the conference on "Culture and Science" organized by the Humanities Research Center of the Australian National University, and held at Cairns in August 1996. For their assistance in research, I am indebted to Helen Aquart and Paul Cammell.

LITERATURE CITED

- ANDERSON, MARGARET, and A. REEVES. 1994. Contested identities: Museums and the nation in Australia. Pages 79–124 in F. E. S. Kaplan, ed. *Museums and the making of "ourselves": The role of objects in national identity*. Leicester University Press, London.
- BATESON, G. 1972. *Steps to an ecology of mind*. Ballantine, New York.
- BAUDRILLARD, J. 1975. *The mirror of production*. Telos Press, St. Louis, Missouri.
- BENNETT, 1995. *The birth of the museum*. Routledge, London.
- BOLTON, L. 1984. Recording oceanic collections in Australia: Problems and questions. *Museum* 36(1): 32–36.
- . 1993. Finding the right model: Museums, cultural centres and cultural heritage management in the Pacific. *Bull. Conf. Mus. Anthropol.* 24:40.
- BRENNAN, D. 1990. The National Museum of Fiji—A thumbnail sketch. *Museum* 42(1): 34–35.
- CANTWELL, R. 1995. Ethnomimesis: Folklife and the representation of culture, reviewed in K. D. Robb, *Museums creating culture*. *J. Folklore Res.* 32(3): 283–287.
- CLIFFORD, J. 1988. *The predicament of culture: Twentieth century ethnography, literature and art*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- COLE, C. 1994. Preserving culture in the Solomon Islands. *Muse* 12(1): 30–39.
- COOMBES, A. 1994. *Reinventing Africa: Museums, material culture and popular imagination*. Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut.
- EOE, S. 1990. The role of museums in the Pacific: Change or die. *Museum* 42(1): 29–31.
- EOE, S., and P. SWADLING, EDS. 1991. *Museums and cultural centres in the Pacific*. Papua New Guinea National Museum, Port Moresby.
- FOUCAULT, M. 1986. Of other spaces. *Diacritics*, Spring: 22–27.
- GREENBLATT, S. 1991. Resonance and wonder. Pages 42–57 in I. Karp and S. D. Lavine, eds. *Exhibiting cultures: The poetics and politics of museum display*. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C.
- HAKIWAI, A. 1990. Once again the light of day? Museums and Maori culture in New Zealand. *Museum* 62(1): 35–38.
- HUDSON, K. 1991. How misleading does an ethnographical museum have to be? Pages 457–465 in I. Karp and S. D. Lavine, eds. *Exhibiting cultures: The poetics and politics of museum display*. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C.
- HUNT, C. 1978. Museums in the Pacific Islands: A metaphysical justification. *Museum* 30(2): 69–75.
- JONES, P. 1992. Museums and the meanings of their contents. *New Lit. Hist.* 23(4): 911–921.
- JOSEPH, O. 1980. Cook Islands. Pages 141–143 in R. Edwards and J. Stewart, eds. *Preserving indigenous cultures*. Australian Government Printing Service, Canberra.
- KAEPLER, ADRIENNE. 1994. Pacific museums and national identity. Pages 19–43 in F. E. S. Kaplan, ed. *Museums and the making of "ourselves": The role of objects in national identity*. Leicester University Press, London.
- KAHN, M. 1995. Heterotopic dissonance in the museum representation of Pacific Island cultures. *Am. Anthropol.* 97(2): 324–338.

- KAPLAN, F. E. S., ED. 1994. Museums and the making of "ourselves": The role of objects in national identity. Leicester University Press, London.
- KARP, I. 1991. Other cultures in museum perspective. Pages 373–386 in I. Karp and S. D. Lavine, eds. *Exhibiting cultures: The poetics and politics of museum display*. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C.
- KASATHEROU, E. 1989. New Caledonian Museum. Unpubl. paper, PNG National Museum, Port Moresby. Cited in L. Bolton, 1993, *Finding the right model: Museums, cultural centres and cultural heritage management in the Pacific*. Bull. Conf. Mus. Anthropol. 24:40.
- KOHLSTEDT, S. 1995. Essay review: Museums: Revisiting sites in the history of the natural sciences. *J. Hist. Biol.* 28:151–166.
- KREPS, C. 1994. The paradox of cultural preservation in museums. *J. Arts Manage., Law and Soc.* 23(4): 291–306.
- KROS, C. 1993. Tokens of the past? Pages 3–5 in *Myths, monuments, museums*. Spec. issue of the South African Historical Journal, No. 29.
- MACLEOD, R. and P. F. REHBOCK. 1994. Darwin's laboratory: Evolutionary theory and natural history in the Pacific. University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu.
- MEAD, S. 1983. Indigenous models of museums in Oceania. *Museum* 35(2): 98–102.
- MELEISEA, M. 1981. "Culture is not something you can eat": Some thoughts on cultural preservation and development in Oceania. *Museum* 33(2): 122.
- MUNJERI, D. 1991. Refocusing or reorientation? The exhibit or the populace: Zimbabwe on the threshold. Pages 444–457 in I. Karp and S. D. Lavine, eds. *Exhibiting cultures: The poetics and politics of museum display*. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C.
- PANNELL, S. 1994. Mabo and museums: The Indigenous (re)appropriation of indigenous things. *Oceania* 65: 18–39.
- PESCOTT, R. 1954. Collections of a century. The history of the first hundred years of the National Museum of Victoria. National Museum of Victoria, Melbourne.
- RODMAN, M. 1993. A critique of "place" through the Field Museum's Pacific exhibits. *Contemp. Pac.* 5(2): 243–274.
- ROSE, R. 1990. From treasure house to permanent source of instruction: A century of Hawaii's Bishop Museum. *Museum* 62(1): 39–44.
- SEN, A. 1996. Family fortunes of bronze age mint. Review of J. Goody, *The East in the West*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. Page 20 in *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 31 May 1996.
- SILVERSTONE, R. 1992. The medium is the museum: On objects and logics in times and spaces. Pages 34–44 in J. Durant, ed. *Museums and the public understanding of science*. Science Museum, London.
- TE PAPA TONGAREWA, Museum of New Zealand. 1995. Annual Report, Wellington, 1994–1995.
- THOMAS, N. 1989. Material culture and colonial power: Ethnological collecting and the establishment of Colonial Rule in Fiji. *Man* 24:41–56.
- . 1991. *Entangled objects: Exchange, material culture and colonialism in the Pacific*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- . 1993. The beautiful and the damned. Page 46 in A. Stephens, ed. *Pirating the Pacific: Images of trade, travel and tourism*. Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.
- . 1994. *Colonialism's culture: Anthropology, travel and government*. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.
- . 1995. Indigenous presences and national narratives in Australasian museums. Paper presented to Museums Australia, *Communicating Cultures*, Brisbane.
- WENDT, A. 1980. Reborn to belong: Culture and colonialism in the Pacific. Pages 25–34 in R. Edwards and J. Stewart, eds. *Preserving indigenous cultures: A new role for museums*. Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.